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DEMOCRACY'S OPPORTUNITY¹

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THE present moment is an interesting as well as dramatic one in the history of civilization. The recent military victory of democracy over autocracy marks progress in formulating a reply to the question to what extent man is justified in having classed himself as *homo sapiens*. Is he really "the wise man"? Will it be easier under a democratic than it was under the autocratic régime to substantiate his claim to the title? Does his behavior since the war presage that reason henceforth will count for more than it ever has done in the control of human affairs? Will democracy be equal to its present opportunity of assisting in the study of man with the object of finding out how thought may be liberated from the domineering control of instinct, custom and precedent, thus replacing eventually a rudimentary rationality by fully developed reason. In view of what is going on in the world, could any more important service be rendered to a government than is expressed in the purpose of this society to study man in order to find out first, what the forces are in his personality that would both quicken the development of his reasoning power and second assist in the gradual elimination from the human race of those traits that make it easy for man to-day to wish intemperately while limiting his capacity to reason connectedly. These are matters of transcendent importance.

Since eugenics calls for the solution of problems of vital importance to the race this society can not afford to be even indirectly associated with any propaganda or uplift that is purely emotionally directed and is an indication merely of the wandering of desire. The organizers of this society very wisely emphasized the word research, and thereby disclaimed all connection with the enthusiasts who rush into the field of eugenics armed only with good intention. The campaign upon which so many important issues depend should be very carefully planned. There are, however, unusual difficulties at present in trying to effect a rational organization for any purpose. One of the first steps is to be sure we have correctly visualized our problem.

¹ Address of the President of the Eugenics Association.

An unfortunate effect of the war has been to give us a false perspective: man's actual place in nature and the importance of events in his history once again have been misjudged. We need to be continually reminded of the fact that, if the history of the earth's crust is divided into twenty-four hours, primitive man first appeared on the scene during the last quarter of an hour, while civilized man—this same man who boasts of possessing huge armies and enormous guns—has existed for about twelve seconds!

Once the perspective is corrected, there is more chance that a few of the various problems perplexing us to-day will be correctly appraised with the result that we shall take many of our conventionalized opinions less seriously and shall be in a better frame of mind to consider, with all its consequences, whether man is becoming more or less rational. Probably occasional reflection upon the real, not imaginary, place occupied by man in nature would have a salutary restraining effect upon those ardent expositors of half-baked schemes for reorganizing government or improving the race who, unable to distinguish between the products of wishful- and reality-thinking, have derived their notions as to what man's capacity and needs are from the present very limited supply of facts. Man, while taking his opinions about himself very seriously, seems to ignore almost completely his defective self knowledge and except under pressure steadily refuses to observe the precautions necessary for making reason a more potent influence in the control of behavior. In as much as we are inclined to overestimate man's capacity for rational thought, we should remember how often human affairs at present are discussed in a manner that suggests the irritability and censorious manner of a psychoneurotic personality. A peculiar emotional disposition unfavorable for the development of reason increases the difficulty in reaching a just decision in regard to all questions now before the world. For this reason eugenics has a larger task than that comprised merely in the acquisition of facts. It depends for success upon the preparation the human mind has had to accept the truth whenever it is presented. As preliminary to this success, it is essential that attention should be given to the various influences now holding reason in check, and an effort should be made to remove these and leave man in a better position than he is in to-day to decide great issues intelligently. This will be a difficult task requiring both patience and intelligence.

The great question we are facing in the world is not the adjustment of boundaries, nor the settlement of European

affairs on a peaceful basis, but the real issue is whether man is capable of reacting favorably to the appeal of reason. Historians say we are passing through a crisis in western civilization, statesmen declare the principles of liberty and justice are jeopardized and that the tragedy predicted by the prophets of the eighteenth century has been enacted with an indefinite prolongation of the tragic epilogue. The significance of all this trouble expressed in simplest terms, and avoiding all show of rhetoric, is that man has become unmanageable because he is not understood. In view of the present confusion of minds throughout the entire world, and the immediate dangers arising from egotism and frenzied outbursts of pride and ambition, it is obvious that any society organized as is the Eugenics Research Association for the express purpose of finding out what constitute the desirable and undesirable qualities in the human personality and to do whatever is possible to assist in cultivating the former and eliminating the latter is actually engaged in laying the only foundation upon which democracy can ever hope to build securely.

The functions collectively designated as reason represent a final stage in man's long evolutionary history. Rationality is a collective term for a group of functions only recently acquired. Of course, it is obvious to any intelligent person that we can not understand either the nature of these functions or the conditions favorable to their development without a definite and exact knowledge of man.

Autocracy failed largely because it did not possess this information and asked to have the world made safe for a system arbitrarily selected for controlling human behavior. Germany's effort to control the affairs of the world failed because little attention had been paid to the study of man as he is.

The success of democracy depends on the cultivation of quite a different mental attitude towards the great human problem. We can not afford to imitate the blustering boastful methods of autocracy, nor to ask to have the world made safe for any particular system of organized control, until we know what the forces are that determine mental attitudes, extend the sphere of reason, and what methods may be used to minimize or eliminate the influences that distort the mind and give rise to a series of irrationally constituted opinions and a mental vision blurred by seeing the world through false refracting media.

The degree of intelligent interest and amount of support given to any well-organized movement to encourage the study of man as he is are indications of whether democracy is prepar-

ing to make good use of its present unique opportunity of placing reason in control in the direction of human affairs.

Democracy can not endure unless it succeeds in making man "the true study of man." In order to attain ultimate success there must be a clear appreciation of the nature of the methods to be applied in securing the desired information, and these methods will now be briefly described. Two distinct lines of attack are open to us in seeking for information relating to the laws governing human behavior. In the first place, there is the analytical method, also described as the elementary point-of-view, characterized by careful painstaking study of the different organs and structures composing the body. In marked contrast to this method of procedure there is the synthetic method, the study of the machine as a whole, which unfortunately has not been generally recognized by scientists as being of equal importance to the former procedure. There can not be too much analytical research, but, as George Sarton has reminded us, this must always be balanced by a corresponding amount of coordinating work. The detailed information supplied in regard to the parts and different mechanisms of the human machine must be correlated with what we know about its behavior as a living organism, adjusting to meet the demands made in the particular environment in which the individual lives. The failure to appreciate the value of the information derived from the study of human beings considered as living, functioning, biologic organisms has had not only unfortunate, but often tragic results. This oversight has resulted in the attention of physicians and psychologists being devoted almost exclusively to the use of analytical methods and has given little opportunity to demonstrate what results can be accomplished in explaining the phenomenon of behavior by the combined use of the two methods. At present, the methods used in training physicians suggests the mental attitude of those who work only in repair shops in which the human machine is taken apart and the different organs examined, but where little provision exists for following the machine on the road, observing its behavior and taking note of the immediate effect of the strain and stress of living as expressed in the complex functions of the human personality. The disadvantages of placing too much faith in the efficacy of analytical methods are easily recognized by those who take an intelligent practical interest in the subject of eugenics. Every investigator in this field should be familiar in a general way with the technic of examining analytically the different organs as practised by

expert clinicians, but in addition there should also be plenty of opportunity for becoming acquainted with the difficult art of studying the synthesis expressed in the personality.

Not only is it necessary that the investigator in eugenics should have some practical experience in the difficult technic of examining human beings, but it is equally important that he approach the problem from a broad biological point of view. He has to consider in the first place the machinery which is the product of evolution and then equally important is the observation of variations in behavior as the environment changes. We are altogether too much inclined when discussing the possibility of the inheritance of definite functions and traits to treat these as if they were specific and sharply defined qualities; and this is not the case: Another mistake often made is the tendency to regard the transmission of traits of temperament and character as the result of the functional activity only of the brain and nervous system. These so-called psychological phenomena should be discussed as biological reactions of the entire organism. In other words, we should never forget that the functions of the brain and nervous system are being continually modified by the action of other organs. When once we grasp the full significance of this principle we shall be less inclined to stress the importance of intelligence tests, or in any way to convey the impression that the consideration of the functions of any one organ, or groups of organs, may be correctly gauged without taking into account the modification produced in these reactions by a great many different factors that are too frequently overlooked or ignored.

Many of the difficulties that man has been obliged to overcome before discovering a successful method for analyzing his personality are of his own making. Progress in this direction has been unnecessarily slow on account of his tendency to create artificial distinctions in studying physical and mental processes. We should plainly recognize the fact that the investigator who approaches the study of man from the specialist's standpoint without being thoroughly drilled, not only in general biological but also in clinical principles, so that he recognizes the integrity and unity of living organisms, is bound to make serious mistakes in interpreting the phenomena of behavior.

Man's intellectual conceits and personal vanity have also told heavily against him in the efforts to know himself. He still discusses his higher intellectual functions as if these had little connection with the lower forms of adjustment, represented by adaptations at the physical level or by reactions of

lower animals. Even if this belief is seldom expressed, the mental attitude persists that is responsible for the assumption that persons who have not had practice in the clinic in the study of the functions of different organs are, without further preparation, equal to the task of analyzing the subjective phenomena represented in the personality. On the other hand, the assumption is also equally erroneous that investigators trained solely in the study of the bodily functions are equipped to undertake the analysis of the mental reactions.

The science of eugenics, as we all know, is still in its infancy, and its development should be directed along rational lines. A false step, the result of an enthusiasm often born of the best intentions, but not held strictly in check by reason, may have unfortunate results and give some justification to the reproach that this movement having as its object the improvement of racial prospects is a fad. The possible good that may eventually be accomplished by the selective breeding of human beings is a subject making such a striking appeal to the active imagination that the preliminary preparation necessary for the patient search for the essential facts may be forgotten or completely ignored.

A moment's reflection should be sufficient to convince any one of us that we can not go very far in the study of eugenics without the assistance of a body of investigators specially trained in the difficult act of studying the personality. The data supplied in personality records should be as severely criticized as are the histories of dogs or horses used for breeding purposes. Our common-sense tells us that the best judge of the good and bad qualities of these animals is the person who has had practical experience in studying canine or equine behavior coupled with some knowledge of the general anatomy and physiology of *these animals*. Exactly the same principle should be applied to the study of man. We must know something about human anatomy, physiology and psychology, and this information must be corrected and supplemented by deductions based upon the observation of the daily life of these beings. There are very few investigators trained in the art of observing human behavior. A good many people, speaking in relative terms, understand parts of the machinery and judge its performance from the angle of the physiologist or that of the psychologist interested in some particular aspect of adjustment, but there are relatively very few possessing this information who are able to tell us much about the reactions of the machine as a whole to the conditions actually met with in life. A

personality can not be judged correctly from the standpoint of either physiologist or psychologist. The specialist's approach to the problem should be broadened out so as to include the information relating to the daily life of an individual, giving some indication of how obstacles are met, overcome, or avoided.

Eugenics is confronted by the same difficulty in securing thoroughly trained observers that has been such a serious obstacle in the path of modern psychiatry. Relatively little interest is taken in the medical schools in disorders of behavior, and practically little attention is paid to training students in the complicated art of analyzing character. This indifference of the general as well as medical public to the need of making adequate provision for investigating the disorders of conduct usually described as nervous and mental diseases has had most disastrous consequences.

The high rate of incidence of specific nervous and mental disorders as well as the increasing symptoms of nervousness has become a menace to our civilization. The point to which we wish to direct attention especially at present is that the indifference of the medical profession, as well as of the public, to the study of human behavior has not only been largely responsible for the increase in these diseases, but it has created a serious difficulty in developing the science of eugenics. The fact that we know so very little about the laws governing human behavior and the organization of the personality has led, on the one side, to conditions peculiarly favorable for the increase of nervous and mental maladjustments and, on the other hand, has deprived us of the knowledge necessary for carrying on an effective campaign to eliminate the unfit and to conserve the qualities essential for human progress.

The following summary of the replies to the questionnaire sent by Mr. H. H. Laughlin to the deans of medical schools in the country will give some indication of the little attention paid to the study of eugenics.

I. No special course given and no interest exhibited in replying to questionnaire	14
II. No special course, but subject treated in work of various departments	11
III. No special institution, but hope to organize courses when means are available	1
IV. No courses, but suggestions welcomed	3
V. Same as II, but expresses marked interest	5
VI. Same as II, but also is taught in connection with sociology....	2
VII. No special courses given. Eugenics referred to in connection with one of following subjects—surgery, pathology, embryology, anatomy, zoology	12

VIII. Express regret that no instruction is given	1
IX. Referred for information to other members of the faculty, from whom no answer was received	3
X. School discontinued—Total	53

The work of gathering together a body of well-trained investigators would be aided materially by establishing scholarships in our medical schools for those intending to pursue the study of eugenics. For some time we should not attempt to do more than to carry on a campaign with the object of eliminating the unfit. In order to determine what the undesirable qualities are, it is necessary that those conducting the examinations should be capable of determining to what extent the environment has become a potent factor in changing the personality. In order to do this an examiner should be thoroughly conversant with methods used by the modern psychiatrist in the examination of patients. It is very often the case that undesirable qualities supposed to be transmitted directly by inheritance prove upon examination to be merely the results of repressions in members of a family who have tried to adjust themselves to an environment unsuited to their biological requirements. A change in the surroundings may lead to astonishing results and the supposedly inherited biological tendencies are quickly replaced by more successful forms of adjustment. We do not refer, of course, to the cases of mental defects due to organic causes and which are evidently a direct product of inheritance. We should not make the mistake, however, of entrusting the diagnosis of mental defectiveness to those whose limit of experience in the examination of human beings makes it necessary for them to draw sharp artificial lines of distinction between physical and mental reactions.

A great deal of work is yet to be accomplished in laying the foundations of the science of eugenics before positive direct recommendations for improving the racial prospects are made to the public; except urging the use of selective methods in breeding to eliminate the unfit. Careful consideration should be given to the problem of training investigators in the very difficult part of studying the personality. The analysis of temperament and character can not be undertaken successfully by amateurs. Something could be done to improve the methods used in the study of personalities in relation to the problem of eugenics by establishing fellowships in the medical schools for investigators intending to enter this special field of research. A good deal may also be accomplished in this same direction by improving the facilities for making personality studies that are

present in the psychiatric clinics. The assistants who are to direct the work of analyzing human predispositions and the special traits of character and intelligence will be drawn chiefly from those having had experience in the work of these clinics. While we are discussing the foundations upon which the science of eugenics should be established, we should not omit a reference to the scant provision now made for the study of the brain and nervous system. We are accustomed to refer to normal and abnormal conditions in the structure and functions of these organs as if exact standards of comparison had already been established; and this is not the case. Practically little is known about the great mechanism of adjustment, and it is astounding how indifferent man seems to be in regard to his most recently acquired and valued possession, his new brain. Adequate provision should be made for studying the nervous system as this field of investigation has important connection with the science of eugenics.

The crisis confronting us to-day is a real one, and many people are gradually becoming conscious of the significance of the problem upon which current events are forcing a decision. Behind discussion about social readjustments, rearrangement of international boundaries, and a League of Nations, all of which are practically minor issues, stands the open question whether man is entitled to be designated as "*homo sapiens*." Do the events through which we are passing mark the beginning or end of the period of rational thought in the evolution of man. Is the triumph of democracy the beginning of a decline to the dead level of mediocrity? We have accustomed ourselves to rely upon wishful-thinking for answer to these questions. Probably if we decide to make the effort, an intelligent reply can be formulated. If democracy assists in making man the true study of man, the chances are that intelligence will become a much more dominant factor in the control of human behavior while mankind will be in a better position both to judge what the racial prospects are and to accept and apply the teachings of eugenics.